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EUROG003

THEORETICAL ISSUES IN HISTORY AND LITERATURE

Creativity in the Trivium

Human Nature and the Power-Knowledge Nexus.

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An elaboration of the title of this essay is required to counter its elusiveness. Whilst the sub-title is a first attempt at this, it is far from sufficient. The title is a reference to the exploration that follows: its topic, its framework, and its purpose. ‘Creativity’ is what will be considered, the notion of it with regards to human nature, and its implications for the individual. The ‘Trivium’ has a two-fold meaning. First, it is a loose definition of remit, with reference to the classical trivium, which, historically, consisted of *grammar*, *dialectic* (logic), and *rhetoric*. However, no attempt will be made to improve on, or extend, such seminal work as that undertaken by McLuhan in his thesis on the *Classical Trivium*.¹ Rather, of its first use, it is little more than an arbitrary division of the primary sources to be explored, and much less a classification of them. The second understanding of a ‘Trivium’ is signifying this essay’s purpose, and is derived from the etymology of the word itself. A ‘trivium’ is ‘a place where three ways meet’²; and similarly, it is the reconciliation of seemingly diverging views on human nature, in relation to the power-knowledge nexus that is sought.

Kierkegaard, the Existentialist, distinguishes between ‘objective truth’, which he equates with science, and ‘subjective truth’, which he lodges firmly in the ‘existing individual’. A philosophy of life, according to Kierkegaard, can only accommodate a questioning of the latter type, as ‘only the truth that edifies is truth for you’³. Creativity in human nature may not overlap perfectly with a philosophy of life, but with a pre-requisite of tying down knowledge, it exists in the same intersection of objective and subjective truths. Arguably, the purpose of philosophy is to mediate between the natural (‘objective’) and the social (‘subjective’) sciences. And it is with an inevitable sense of inferiority to modern scientific achievements that the understanding of the self must escape one, and become another; in other words, and by example, how can a theory of human nature avoid the Einsteinian concept of relativity, and how can a theory of power be described as empirically lucid as Maxwell’s laws of thermodynamics? If myth is continuously exorcised on behalf of science, will human nature ever be next?

Society can be said to be the ‘outward expression of man’⁴, and it is as such a Petri dish in which human nature can be studied. Even if man is indecipherable to man his residual effects, of which society is one, might be enough to describe his nature. The

¹ Marshall McLuhan, *The Classical Trivium, The Place of Thomas Nashe in the Learning of His Time*, Gingko Press, 2006.

² Oxford English Dictionary entry for ‘trivium’, available online at <http://dictionary.oed.com>

³ Frithiof Brandt, *Søren Kirkegaard*, Det Danske Selskab, 1963, p. 64.

⁴ J Krishnamurti, *Commentaries on Living: First Series*, Krishnamurthi Foundation India, 2001, p. 47.

fear, of course, is that society is part of human nature, and therefore equally impossible to get at. Nevertheless, at a glance, society is man-made, inevitably or not, and stands in a particular relation to the individual. This relation is a vector difference of force and direction; at every 'point of consideration' a tension exists between individuals and their respective concerns. Regardless of the source of motivation (e.g. moral or economic) and position of the individual, even one of institutional significance, the movement made beyond a point of consideration is more often than not described through a concept of power. In modern societies that tension extends to, and is taken to be more pronounced between, institutions and the individual. Having assumed a broader collective form in theory, particularly in the latter half of the twentieth century, institutions now transcend the usual State apparatuses. With an omnipresent conception of power, its strongholds don't just transcend institutions; they have come to define them. Assuming the apparent continuity of change is not fictitious, a certain dynamics of power must exist if the concept is awarded formative effects. Thus power, if not held or generated, must be transmitted; and allowing for its higher concentration in places, must be relinquished by many, or drawn from many, into a focal point of temporality. And, conversely, if power is held or generated, a variation in holdings must still be accounted for if it is to remain a vehicle for societal change. As technological advances, through accumulated knowledge, give an effect of immediate and lasting impact it is usual to assume that knowledge is somehow connected to the concept of power, as described above. The importance we grant this nexus, and how much of a part it plays in our creativity could well be equal; if so, perhaps human nature is not something we cannot understand, but it is something we will not understand.

The Grammarian

As a professor of linguistics, labelling Noam Chomsky a grammarian will cause no offence. His work in the field has been revelatory and underscores his views on human nature. Chomsky argues that language displays a capacity for creating new structures, a Universal Grammar, and as children develop this quickly and with limited instructions, it must be innate; an instinct for language. His reasoning is empirical, establishing what he calls "the argument from the poverty of the input" [as] the primary justification for

saying that the basic design of language is innate'.⁵ The seeming paradox between the poverty of input and the richness of output is no paradox at all for Chomsky: 'limitations imposed by biological endowment on the cognitive systems that can be deployed by the mind' must exist for the construction of a uniform language.⁶ In other words, the lack of a least common denominator is the same as the existence of an infinite array of possible 'knowledges', which Chomsky sees as amounting to no 'knowledges':

We must investigate specific domains of human knowledge or systems of belief, determine their character, and study their relation to the brief and personal experience on which they are erected. A system of knowledge and belief results from the interplay of innate mechanisms, genetically determined maturational processes, and interaction with the social and physical environment. The problem is to account for the system constructed by the mind in the course of this interaction. The particular system of human knowledge that has, so far, lent itself most readily to such an approach is the system of human language.⁷

Although Chomsky hardly posits explicit postulates on power that together form a comprehensive theory, his prolific scattering of views through political activism spanning half a century has left rich pickings. By admission a libertarian-anarchist, Chomsky aspires to a socialist and anti-state society that is democratically organised at all levels. Power, in this tradition, should always be assumed to be illegitimate, with the onus on 'those who claim that some authoritarian hierarchic relation is legitimate' to prove otherwise.⁸ This deep suspicion of power is boundless and indiscriminate to its source: 'what grounds are there for supposing that those whose claim to power is based on knowledge and technique will be more benign in their exercise of power than those whose claim is based on wealth or aristocratic origin?'⁹ Associating the maintenance of any system of power with fear and subordination, and distinguishing between 'domains of popular power' and 'centres of concentrated power', Chomsky is a strong proponent for decentralization.¹⁰ This distrust of a system of centralized power, which will almost inevitably 'operate very efficiently in the interest of the most powerful elements within it' is coupled with his belief that 'fundamental human emotions of sympathy and search for

⁵ Steven Pinker, *The Language Instinct*, Penguin, 1994, p. 42.

⁶ Noam Chomsky, 'A Philosophy of Language', in *The Chomsky-Foucault Debate on Human Nature*, The New Press, 2006, p. 118.

⁷ Noam Chomsky, *Problems of Knowledge and Freedom*, Fontana, 1972.

⁸ Noam Chomsky interviewed by Harry Kreisler, 'Activism, Anarchism, and Power', in *Conversations with History*, March 22, 2002, available at <http://www.chomsky.info/interviews/20020322.htm>.

⁹ Noam Chomsky, *Chomsky on Anarchism*, Fontana, 1972, p. 13.

¹⁰ Peter R. Mitchell and John Schoeffel (eds), *Understanding Power: The Indispensable Chomsky*, The New Press, 2002, p. 267.

justice' could arise 'within a system of free association' and provide a safer basis for progress.¹¹ The relationship between force and indoctrination is also one that Chomsky highlights, correlating the success of popular movements in curbing power to the rise in the need to control people's thoughts. '[I]f you lose power to control people by force, you need better indoctrination', this Orwellian notion, he says, is of foremost importance in modern liberal-democratic intellectual thought.¹² Having extracted what hardly amounts to a comprehensive methodology, and what appears to be a rather pessimistic view of the world, it can be summarized as follows:

- i. Power is presumed illegitimate;
- ii. Power is best decentralized;
- iii. Power is force or indoctrination.

Ultimately, Chomsky is of the opinion that 'any serious social science or theory of social change must be founded on some concept of human nature.'¹³ Justice, to Chomsky, is the only valid argument for resorting to violence, and the acquisition of 'fundamental human values' the only legit purpose for a 'transfer of power'.¹⁴ Thus Chomsky's final postulate could read: 'Human nature can improve justice'.

Much has been made of the disagreement that arose in the second part of the debate between Noam Chomsky and Michel Foucault on human nature. The sticking point that emerged was on the rationale of revolution, where the accommodation of justice as a legitimising argument for collective action divided the two. In a sense, both thinkers recognised the duality of the task of building a better society, through a vision based on human needs and through the unclinking of power. The importance of each part, however, was where they diverged. Allowing for the near-impossibility of success, Chomsky emphasises the need to construct a society from essential characteristics of human nature that will realise such properties. Foucault, on the other hand, stresses the need to discern power for the suppression of power, and rejects any capacity to create a useful vision for society on self-referential grounds. Having agreed on the extreme limitation of the potential to understand human nature in the more philosophical first part

¹¹ Noam Chomsky and Michel Foucault, *The Chomsky-Foucault Debate on Human Nature*, The New Press, 2006, p. 63.

¹² Peter R. Mitchell and John Schoeffel (eds), *Understanding Power: The Indispensable Chomsky*, The New Press, 2002, p. 17.

¹³ Noam Chomsky, 'A Philosophy of Language', in *The Chomsky-Foucault Debate on Human Nature*, The New Press, 2006, p. 126.

¹⁴ Noam Chomsky and Michel Foucault, *The Chomsky-Foucault Debate on Human Nature*, The New Press, 2006, p. 52.

of the debate, it seems Chomsky's weighting of these two tasks is out of proportion. Drawing from experience in political activism, where the need to take up a position is paramount, part of this can be explained pragmatically; the remainder is simply faith. Foucault, on the offensive, highlights this early on in the debate, suggesting that Chomsky's view on creativity in human nature belongs to the 'Augustian stream of Christian thought' rather than the Cartesian one, to which Chomsky refers.¹⁵ The problem for Foucault is the reliability of the 'speaking subject', and this is accordingly what distinguishes the two:

[W]hat I am anxious about is substituting transformations of the understanding for the history of the discoveries of knowledge. Therefore I have, in appearance at least, a completely different attitude to Mr. Chomsky apropos creativity, because for me it is a matter of effacing the dilemma of the knowing subject, while for him it is a matter of allowing the dilemma of the speaking subject to reappear.¹⁶

The Dutch philosopher Fons Elders who organised the debate in 1971 introduced Chomsky and Foucault as two 'tunnellers [...] working at opposite sides of the same mountain with different tools'.¹⁷ This corresponds well with Foucault's own explanation of their different views on creativity in human nature. The two approaches to a history of knowledge, he says, have two points of views: that of the speaking subject and that of understanding itself. Respectively, creativity is new knowledge from a set of rules (e.g. Universal Grammar) in the subject, or from understanding modifying 'itself in its formative rules'.¹⁸ Foucault's suspicion of the speaking subject with regards to creativity and the generation of knowledge is little more than an Existential conundrum, which he expresses: 'what if understanding the relation of the subject to the truth, were just an effect of knowledge?'¹⁹ Considering Kierkegaard's spheres of existence (the aesthetic, the ethical, the religious) and their near-corresponding schools of thought (Epicurean, Stoic, Christian) as an interesting, yet tenuous aside, Foucault, clearly taking pleasure in mental agility, is perhaps the Epicurean aesthetic, whilst Chomsky in this scheme, though not Christian, yet decidedly a Darwin-sceptic²⁰, can be said to be the Humanist religious.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

²⁰ Steven Pinker, *The Language Instinct*, Penguin, 1994, p. 355: 'Chomsky, one might think, would have everything to gain by grounding his controversial theory about a language organ in the firm foundation of

The Rhetorician

In Francis Bacon's essay *Of Truth*, he paraphrases Lucretius' elaboration of Epicurus' philosophy, elevating mental pleasures above all others: 'no pleasure is comparable to the standing upon the vantage ground of truth [...] and to see the errors and wanderings and mists and tempests in the vale below'.²¹ Fulfilling the Ciceroan criteria of an eloquent man, that he must teach, delight, and persuade, Bacon holds that truth 'which only doth judge itself, teacheth that the inquiry of truth, which is the love-making or wooing of it, the knowledge of truth, which is the presence of it, and the belief of truth, which is the enjoying of it, is the sovereign good of human nature'.²² Michel Foucault, with his gifts of language and extensive lecturing, is a near match to Cicero's ideal orator, or in the Greek vernacular, a rhetorician.

Truth, for Foucault, is the status of truth. The discovery of truth is not an item of knowledge, but the detachment of the power to distinguish between true and false from the item of knowledge itself. Foucault rejects the notion that power is only negative, and blames the concepts of repression and ideology for this view. The idealised need for 'a power without a bludgeon, and [...] knowledge without deception' is blinding a better view on power, and by blocking out this wistfulness, almost like enhancing telescopic depth by blocking the sun, Foucault begins his search for power's 'missing matter'.²³ Foucault's first volume of *The History of Sexuality* is the work that offers the most explicit outline of a theory of power, and it is accompanied by 'rules' on how to dissect power-knowledge nexuses. This section will focus more on Foucault's methodology of power than on his actual postulates on power, as the former incorporates the latter. And since an understanding of human nature is sought, the methodology will delimit creativity more than would the postulates.

Discourse, including all silences, is the joining of power and knowledge, and is what allows for an investigation of the status of truth. Tracing the proliferation of discourse, suggests Foucault, is understanding the application of power, as the rise in one results in the rise of the other.

evolutionary theory, and in some of his writings he has hinted at a connection. But more often he is sceptical.'

²¹ Francis Bacon, *The Essays*, Penguin, 1985, p. 62.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Michel Foucault, 'Truth and Power', in *The Chomsky-Foucault Debate on Human Nature*, The New Press, 2006, p. 151.

[P]ower must be understood [...] as *the multiplicity* of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as *the process* which [...] transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as *the support* which these force relations find in one another [...], or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another and lastly, as *the strategies* in which they take effect.

(My italics)²⁴

Relations of power are inherent in every type of relationship. Sexuality, according to Foucault, is ‘an especially dense transfer point for relations of power’.²⁵ Throughout history such relations have combined with available knowledge to make objects of discourse ‘appear’ to form ‘matrices of transformations’.²⁶ In the domain of sexuality, examples of vortices in its matrix are: the child and masturbation, the woman and birth control, the man and his sexuality. The emergence of objects in this structure is expressed by Foucault’s *Rule of Immanence*, which creates and destructs in equal measure. ‘Between techniques of knowledge and strategies of power, there is no exteriority.’²⁷ The mutual dependences of power and knowledge allows for discourse to grow into ‘visible’ objects by the mutual consent of power and knowledge, whilst transcendence of one by the other is impossible. Exteriority is eliminated; absolute truth from the complete exhaustion of power by knowledge, or *vice versa*, cannot be attained. Foucault’s *Rule of Continual Variations* dissolves the permanency of these power-knowledge objects, and highlights the dynamic form force relations take. This is perhaps his plea that to understand the process is more important than to recognise its products. What seems a long-term approach for the politically active individual has a faint echo of Ovid: ‘Spare the whip, boy, and pull harder on the reins’.²⁸ The *Rule of Double Conditioning* ties the small to the large and the large to the small. With terms borrowed from theatres of war, Foucault relates tactics to strategies: ‘one must conceive of the double conditioning of a strategy by the specificity of possible tactics, and of tactics by the strategic envelope that makes them work’.²⁹ Demanding continuity between power-knowledge objects of all sizes whilst stressing their heterogeneity, Foucault resurrects what he had laid to rest by his rejection of ideology. His rule that, by extension, draws up the scope of creativity in human nature, mirrors Marx’s deterministic view: ‘Men make their own history, but they

²⁴ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: 1, The Will to Knowledge*, Penguin, 1998, pp. 92-93.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Francis Bacon, *The Essays*, Penguin, 1985, p. 160: ‘*Parce, puer, stimulis, et fortius utere loris*’

²⁹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: 1, The Will to Knowledge*, Penguin, 1998, p. 97.

do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past.³⁰ The final rule of Foucault's method is the *Rule of the Tactical Polyvalence of Discourses*. Discourse is the manifestation of both positive and negative power, as it 'transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it'.³¹ In summary, Foucault's methodology offers a set of tools to improve our ability to comprehend the dynamics of power relations on a small scale through the continuous construction of a power-knowledge grid, to which the transitory nature of the collection of discourses provides a blueprint. But with such an improved ability, were Foucault's methodology to work, what are the guiding principles of how to make the right use of it? Is Foucault's conception of power void of self-referential critique and therefore irresponsible? Jürgen Habermas's three-pronged attack on Foucault's theory of power charges him with presentism (the past understood in the context of the present), relativism (the rejection of absolute knowledge), and cryptonormativism (the reliance on values whilst claiming their absence). They combine to form the problem of modernity: 'how to practice modern critique in a philosophical manner given its self-referentiality'.³² Rather than evaluating the actual charges made, it is worth looking at how the two adversaries attempt to escape this general crisis of philosophy. Michael Kelly, in *Critique and Power*, conjoins Foucault's and Habermas's description of modernity and thus defines the extent of their agreement: 'modernity is critical toward its own present and [...] must perpetually create its own normativity'.³³ Beyond this harmony, the value-laden term 'normativity' is where their disagreement begins, and can best be explained through their diverging views on what is worth 'keeping' from the Enlightenment. One of the universals to come out of this period is a method of critique, and whilst Habermas wants to preserve this, Foucault sees more value in retaining the critique of method that arose; the contest is seemingly between substance and procedure. With regards to human nature in the power-knowledge nexus, Foucault is not willing to separate critique from power in philosophical discourse, and a consequence of this according to Habermas is the redundancy of values. Foucault concurs: 'the idea of morality as disobedience to a code of rules is now disappearing, has already disappeared. And to this absence of morality

³⁰ David McLellan (ed), *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 300.

³¹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: 1, The Will to Knowledge*, Penguin, 1998, p. 97.

³² Michael Kelly, *Critique and Power*, MIT Press, 1995, p. 382.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 383.

corresponds, must correspond, the search for an aesthetics of existence'.³⁴ Toying further with Kierkegaard's spheres of existence and schools of thought in closing, Habermas rejects the aesthetic for the ethical, and does so with Stoic zeal, as will become apparent below.

The Dialectician

Regardless of which meaning is attributed to the final art of the trivium, Jürgen Habermas is by all accounts a dialectician. A philosopher working in social, political, and legal theory, he is a master of the 'art of critical examination into the truth of an opinion'.³⁵ To begin to assess Habermas conception of creativity and human nature, a detour via his programme of theories must be made. Underlying his social, political, and ethical theories is a highly structured theory of discourse, which starts by extending the theory of meaning from the 'propositional' to the 'pragmatic'. Its aim is to encompass all effects of language, beyond the initial condition of simple truth or falsehood. Pragmatic meaning is not truth, but consensus around a Validity Claim. In a tripartite system of communication (as per Bühler) the three perspectives of the Speaker, the Hearer, and the Knowledge, have specific functions. A validity claim is *expressed* by the speaker to the hearer, in *cognitive* relation to knowledge. And whenever a validity claim is *appealed* by a hearer, *cognitive* of knowledge, and to the speaker, a situation of discourse has arisen. Discourse, in other words, is the expression and subsequent appeal of a validity claim, both rooted cognitively to knowledge; it is a rejected validity claim. A sincere speech act, says Habermas, makes one of three validity claims with corresponding types of discourse: truth-theoretical; moral-rightness; and aesthetic-truthfulness:

'When employing normative utterances in everyday life, we raise claims to validity that we are prepared to defend against criticism [...] But if normative sentences do not admit of truth in the narrow sense of the word "true", [...] we will have to formulate the task of explaining [...] the meaning of "normative rightness" in such a way that we are not tempted to assimilate the one type of sentence to the other. We will have to proceed on a weaker assumption, namely, that normative claims to validity are *analogous to truth claims*.'³⁶

Having laid a foundation of a pragmatic theory of meaning, built on rationally motivated consensus, through discourse, arising from validity claims, Habermas proceeds by

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

³⁵ Oxford English Dictionary entry for 'dialectics', available online at <http://dictionary.oed.com>

³⁶ William Outhwaite (ed), *The Habermas Reader*, Polity Press, 1996, p. 180.

reducing rationality into two forms. Reminiscent of Weber's distinction between value-oriented (wertrational) and goal-oriented (zweckrational) actions, where ends and means take precedence, respectively, Habermas arranges the two chronologically. Society consists of the Lifeworld of communicative action (validity claims), which is a precursor to instrumental action (calculative aims)³⁷, which is embodied in the System. The Lifeworld is the medium through which the cultural reproduction of society is secured. The System provides for the material reproduction of society, and consists of two sub-systems: money and power, which Habermas coins 'steering-media'.

The difference between Habermas's and Foucault's conceptions of power is made apparent by the hierarchical definition of their theories. Whilst Foucault deploys power on all scales and as an omnipresence, Habermas confines it to the second-tier of formative effects in society. Moreover, Habermas binds his theory to time to align it with twentieth century society, thus making it (and alluding to Einstein) 'special' rather than 'general'. Perhaps the most successful consolidation of the hypotheses of Foucault and Habermas is Anthony Giddens' Theory of Structuration. It is also a critique of Foucault's fetishization of power, and Habermas reliance on rationality, void of a measure of chance. By bringing temporality into the social space, Giddens argues that power is generated 'in and through the reproduction of structures of domination'.³⁸ And further, that these structures comprise the domains of, and dominions over, the material world (allocative resources) and the social world (authoritative resources). Thus, the fluctuating Storage Capacity of the two types of resources embeds time in social systems. 'Power [...] is generated by the intersection of authoritative and allocative resources: the first is expanded through the extension of social control of time-space, the second through control of nature'.³⁹ Consequently, the significance of each resource depends as much on the type of society, as the form of society depends on the type of resource that is of highest value.

Returning to Habermas's ideas, and ending an expansive detour, the creativity he allows for in human nature can be derived from the crystallization of his discourse theory into his two principles of discourse (D) and morality (U). The discourse principle is the weaker of the two and states that: 'Just those action norms are valid to which all possibly

³⁷ The distinction Habermas makes is between communicative action, on the one hand, and instrumental and strategic action, on the other. To simplify this distinction instrumental action is taken to include strategic action.

³⁸ Anthony Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism*, Macmillan Press, 1995, p. 4.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

affected persons could agree as participants in rational discourse,' where 'action norms' are 'temporally, socially, and substantively generalized behavioural expectations'.⁴⁰ In other words, within this principle is embodied Habermas procedure for discourse; a validity claim depends on reaching a consensus, or in this negative form, the absence of consensus renders void any claim to validity of a norm. The stronger principle deals with the justification of moral norms, where morality is taken to be an authority beyond social boundaries, and provides as such a framework for moral argument. As both these principles have evolved throughout Habermas's career, a late incarnation is chosen, and it states: 'A norm is valid when the foreseeable consequences and side effects of its general observance for the interests and value-orientations of each *individual* could be *jointly* accepted by *all* concerned without coercion'.⁴¹ In contrast to the discourse principle, which can only deny norms, the moral principle can also positively identify norms. Being a second-order principle, it is useful, yet not entirely accurate, to picture only norms surviving the discourse principle being put to the test of the moral, and universalizing, principle. Yet more succinctly, and quoting McCarthy, Habermas explains the difference between the two principles in that 'the emphasis shifts from what *each can will* without contradiction to be a general law, to what *all can will* in agreement to be a universal norm' (my italics).⁴² Thus, in relation to creativity, it is the productivity of the moral principle (U) that correlate to the aspects of human nature; only 'what all can will' can be said to denote what we are. The near-redundancy of this principle, as very few norms (and possibly none) are generated from it, or found to withstand it, is not a weakness, according to Habermas; it is, rather, strength, affirming the reality of modernity. Finally, Habermas absolves the inability of individuals to create the ideal society; the colonization of the Lifeworld by the System results in anomie, disintegration, alienation, demoralization, and social instability, which leaves the social agent unable to navigate out of a 'pre-established, bewilderingly complex patterns of instrumental reasoning'.⁴³

Conclusion

The existing individual, then, arriving in the trivium, is intersected by three conflicting, yet complimentary, notions of who she, or he, is. 'Human nature', says Universal

⁴⁰ William Outhwaite (ed), *The Habermas Reader*, Polity Press, 1996, p. 204.

⁴¹ Ciaran Cronin and Pablo De Greiff (eds), *The Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory*, MIT Press, 1998, p. 42.

⁴² William Outhwaite (ed), *The Habermas Reader*, Polity Press, 1996, p. 186.

⁴³ James Gordon Finlayson, *Habermas: A Very Short Introduction*, Macmillan Press, 1995, p. 58.

Grammar, 'is your instinct for language; out of nearly nothing you can create nearly anything. You may not necessarily have the capacity to build a better society, but you are obliged to try. This is speech: the continuous reconstruction of existing structures'. 'But how can you know yourself?' interjects Universal Power. 'Trust not in any form of justice; rely rather on recognising the changes in, and transformation of, justice. Understand how your creativity is boundless within certain bounds; and forget human nature.' 'That is irresponsible', says Universal Morality, 'you must temper yourself! A moral standpoint exists, and it is the creativity of your critique that can elucidate such norms; they are in fact implicitly contained in your practices, and if anything is human nature, that is it.'

For all the appeal of each theory on its own terms, and in isolation, it is the discourse between them that is most illuminating. The biological safe house of Chomsky is challenged by Foucault's suspicion of the speaking subject; and Foucault's lack of normative features is condemned by Habermas with his demand for a critique of power. Even though the question of creativity and human nature is not likely to be resolved any time soon, one of its more recent effects may have to be. For some years now the predominant language of the world has been of binary form, delivered electronically; the number of global transactions per day far out-weighs the total of verbal (human) communication. Intrinsicly tied to our capacity for technology, self-learning is not yet an aspect of it, and might perhaps never become one. Nevertheless, the emergence of electronic information sharing networks, and their phenomenal growth, has already demonstrated their magnificent ability to reconfigure the distribution of power on a global scale. New virtual social communities are forming (and fading) with a ferocious and ever-growing speed of migration and magnitude of population. As this virtual existence affects, and is closely aligned to, conventional reality, our task becomes one of identifying these pulsating social beacons and to understand the patterns of their modification, in order to reconstruct a matrix of transformation. And were a situation of discourse ever to arise beyond our immediate control, we would have to answer whether technology have the ability to criticise itself?

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